



BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE TIPS FOR PHYSICAL DISTANCING



We all know that human behavior is critical to mitigating the impact of COVID-19.

Physical distancing, also referred to as social distancing, is a critical strategy to slow the spread of COVID-19. However, many individuals around the world do not have the luxury of practicing physical distancing by working from home or getting their groceries delivered.

While communication efforts are important, as policymakers, funders, and programmers, **it is our responsibility to not just ask people in our communities to practice physical distancing, but to invest and innovate in redesigning social contexts and service delivery to make it feasible for everyone to practice physical distancing.**

Here are some concrete tips for how local and national governments and other institutions can use **behavioral design** to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in communities in low and middle-income countries around the world while facilitating social cohesion and the provision of essential services.

1 Make it easier for people to practice physical distancing in their communities by reshaping their environments.

It's easy to tell people to practice physical distancing, but harder for people to follow through. What if you need to interact with people as part of your faith or if the only way to buy food is to go to the congested market?



Provide incentives to postpone weddings or delay large celebrations



Support small business innovation:

- market vendors to work together to sell ready-to-go baskets of common goods
- rickshaws to deliver goods
- individuals to set up small shops selling essentials where goods were not previously available



Work with religious bodies to determine how to give individuals opportunities to practice their faith safely; encourage call to prayer via radio and home prayer mats



Explore opportunities to support certain industries or organizations to transition to digital-based work through subsidies or regulatory changes

2 Redesign how healthcare and other public services are delivered to facilitate physical distancing while ensuring essential service provision.

We cannot ask people to practice physical distancing and then ask them to wait in long lines to pick up cash benefits or access healthcare in crowded, public facilities.



Explore ways to increase provision of public services that spread out client volume:

- use community agents rather than bringing clients to crowded, central facilities
- offer services such as vaccines more frequently



Stagger distribution times of food and social grants so that only people who live in close proximity to one another collect goods at a given time



Space out benches in waiting areas and put markings on the floor to show people how far apart to stand to decrease their risk of exposure



Prioritize availability and distribution of home testing kits for prevalent diseases, self-injecting contraceptives, and other home-based services, with advice available through hotlines or telehealth

3 Lower the costs, both social and financial, associated with physical distancing.

When physical distancing erodes livelihoods and social capital, people may risk getting infected or infecting others in order to survive.



Expand cash transfer programs to low-income workers in high-contact jobs if they stay home for a period of time or if they engage in different work



Increase subsidies for basic commodities such as cooking gas and food rations which may be particularly salient to people



Partner with telecommunication companies to provide “conference lines” or free airtime to encourage people to engage via phone instead of in-person



Offer optional, free facilities for isolation or quarantine for those who test positive or may have been exposed or some compensation for lost wages

4 Create new benefits and incentives to make physical distancing less painful and more sustainable for people to practice over time.

As the pandemic progresses, people will grow tired of the effort and sacrifice associated with physical distancing, and the perceived risk of infection will become less salient. Adherence to critical preventive behaviors will erode.



Launch radio shows with raffles or prizes for daily participation when people are most likely to want to leave home



Have people vote via SMS or other digital channels on the government benefits or investments they would value most related to COVID-19



Support the development of home-based microenterprises through distance learning resources, seed capital, or supplies and tools



Launch social media or radio competitions where people share creative, fun, or productive activities they are doing at home, especially, with their children



As transmission risk decreases, progressively scale down guidance for how much distancing is required with concrete tips for how to strike this balance

Are you working on improving service delivery and tackling related problems during the COVID-19 pandemic in low and middle-income countries?

Would you like support in generating innovative solutions or adapting them to your context?

Reach out to us at support@ideas42.org and let's talk about strengthening your efforts in this evolving crisis.